

Today, less than 2.3 percent of Washington's population receives welfare benefits. The proportion of people now on welfare in Washington is at the lowest point in over 30 years. Since 1997 the number of families on welfare has dropped 46 percent, from nearly 96,000 to less than 52,000.

WorkFirst is a partnership of five state agencies, with oversight provided by the Office of Financial Management:

- Department of Social and Health Services
- Employment Security Department
- State Board for Community and Technical Colleges
- Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development
- Department of Early Learning

WorkFirst also includes a network of 32 local partnerships that include tribes, community organizations, community and technical colleges, workforce and economic development agencies, and individual citizens.

WorkFirst Caseload

Over the last year, the WorkFirst caseload declined 6.7%. As of January 2007, 52,927 families were receiving WorkFirst. Of these, there were 31,819 adult cases, which are subject to federal participation requirements.

Sanctions

The number of families in sanction status declined by 52% from December 2005 to July 2006.

Caseload at January 2007			
Location	Total TANF Adult Cases	Cases in Sanction Status	
		Number	Percent
Region 1	4,769	272	5.7%
Region 2	4,476	332	7.4%
Region 3	3,644	125	3.4%
Region 4	6,844	302	4.4%
Region 5	5,735	331	5.7%
Region 6	6,350	453	7.1%
Statewide	31,819	1,815	5.7%

Employment

In calendar year 2005:

- ESD: 16,332 of 24,806 (66%) WorkFirst parents were employed after receiving job search services. An annual rate of 66%.
- College: 1,555 of 2,632 (59%) WorkFirst parents were employed after training.
- CJ: 1,469 of 2,171 (68%) WorkFirst parents were employed after community jobs.
- Between January and June 2005, 60% of the parents that became employed left TANF within 3 months.
- ESD, the college, and community jobs each calculate entered employments in a manner unique to their program.

- Employment was 13% higher for participants who completed a full year of vocational training than for those who completed less than 1 year (72% compared to 59%), but less than 3% of WorkFirst participants completed a full year.

Wage Information

The median hourly wage entering employment was \$9.46 per hour for WorkFirst participants who left training in 2005.

In March 2006, Snohomish County had the highest median wage in the state at \$10.00/hr and Benton Franklin the lowest at \$8.11/hr.

Median hourly wages were \$1.61 per hour higher for participants who completed a full year of vocational training than for participants who completed less than 1 year of vocational training (\$11.02 per hour compared to \$9.41 per hour).

Training and Education

WorkFirst supports training and education for low-income parents working at least 20 hours per week, including those who have left the welfare rolls.

In state fiscal year 2006, 3,485 low-income parents enrolled in customized job skills trainings, which are specialized, short-term (up to 22 weeks) programs developed with specific employers who commit to giving first consideration to hiring those who complete the training. Another 3,697 received free tuition at a community or technical college and 4,416 took advantage of literacy and other training services.

Positive Prevention Strategies

In 2005, the WorkFirst program increased our focus on diverting WorkFirst applicants who may not require ongoing public assistance benefits. When a family applies for WorkFirst, the department conducts a thorough screening process to determine if the family has potential income or other resources that would reduce or eliminate their need for ongoing assistance. The purpose is not to “prevent” families from receiving WorkFirst, but to provide support to families while they pursue alternatives.

Diversion Cash Assistance continues to provide a successful alternative to WorkFirst; 75% to 80% of Washington’s Diversion clients remain off welfare for twelve months or more.

Child Care

Many are using Working Connections Child Care, a subsidy program for parents earning up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level – that’s a monthly income of \$2,622 for a single parent with two children.

Parents contribute toward the cost of care based on a sliding scale with a monthly co-payment of at least \$15. Since July 2004, an average of 61,208 children received a child care subsidy per month.

Child Support

In the past year, more than \$324 million was collected statewide on behalf of custodial parents who are or have been receiving welfare.